

These studies not only promote more works from the Global South as a challenge for non-governmental organisations, government institutions and academia, but also stress that all advances that have been done from the South should be recognised in the Global North (Santos, 2016).

If you are looking for some studies about ageing in one of the countries selected by the book, this is an excellent start. In fact, it could be a great reference for different audiences. Students from different levels can learn about the distinctions in the context of the Global South and the relevance of considering it. Researchers who are facing an investigation in these countries can find many suggestions of what is needed in this field, which is always useful in generating ideas for new projects. Finally, it could be helpful even to policy makers with professional backgrounds interested in learning more about these cases and thinking how they could create public policies according to their audience.

This book manages to propose many current challenges equally important for several countries of the Global South. In particular, the authors acknowledge the heterogeneity in the experiences by cohorts and sub-groups in each case. Also, they make some recommendations in the future as opportunities to better confront the fact that, in the Global South, ‘none of these countries are adequately prepared to address the needs of the older adults’ (p. 181). The challenges and the opportunities have been clearly established by this book; now it is our turn, as readers, to take care of them.

References

- Santos BS** (2016) Epistemologies of the South and the future. *From the European South: A Transdisciplinary Journal of Postcolonial Humanities* 1, 17–29.
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Growing Old with the Welfare State. Eight British Lives

Nick Hubble, Jennie Taylor and Philip Tew (eds), Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2019, 159 pp., pbk £17.99, ISBN 13: 978-1-3500-3309-2

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This collection of eight accounts by people in later life of their life stories and reflections on ageing and cultural change in their lifetimes arises from the editors’ own reflections on the experience of ageing following their previous research exploring

individual narratives of that experience (Bazelgette *et al.*, 2011). In particular, they became dubious about the concept of 'successful ageing', concluding that it unfairly implied culpable failure on the part of the 'unsuccessful', and about clear divisions between 'third' and 'fourth' ages. They were increasingly aware of the complexity and diversity of 'old age', a perception confirmed by these accounts. They were produced by four people born in the 1920s and 1930s and four born between 1939 and 1943. Six were originally responses to Mass Observation (MO) directives, written successively from 1992 to 2009, two were responses to the editors' previous research gathering accounts from members of University of the Third Age (U3A) branches between 2009 and 2012. The editors describe them as a 'selection of ordinary people' though they recognise that, given their links to predominantly middle-class MO and U3A, they are unlikely to be representative of the population. How 'ordinary' they are is, as always, unknowable. They demonstrate varied political and social views, *e.g.* about family and sexual relations.

The accounts reveal some differences in the early lives, values and experiences of the two age groups but considerable overlap in their views, including on their own and others' ageing. Most express uncertainty about when 'old age' begins and the difficulty of assessing age just by appearance. None feel 'old' in their sixties, some suggest it starts at 70, others at 75 or 80, recognising it in themselves only when their health begins to fail, rarely before their seventies, when 'everything takes longer, from tying shoelaces to brushing ones' teeth'. Most describe fears of greater frailty to come and the sad ends they have seen to other lives. We never learn their outcomes since they stopped writing or the project ended before they reached their final days. Several reject generalisations and stereotypes about an age group they experience as highly varied: 'it is silly to lump together all those aged between 50 and 90 or 100! – they are very diverse', wrote one. As another rightly puts it, 'Money, class and education cause just as many gulfs amongst the elderly as between young and old'. 'Age is not identity', writes another.

The accounts came from backgrounds ranging from upper-middle to working class, comfortable to very insecure. Like the great majority of their age group most had a decent education but none attended university, though some women did so in later life. But they all benefited from the full employment opportunities for upward social mobility, better pensions and retirement conditions, and welfare provision of the post-1945 era. They all had good jobs, though the five women had lower pay and status than the three men, and decent occupational pensions enabling a comfortable retirement. Most looked forward to retirement, others feared 'unstructured days', the end of 'usefulness', but soon found plenty to do for themselves and others, and enjoyed controlling their own time. Most, like many other older people, engaged in voluntary action with organisations such as Citizens' Advice Bureaux or more informally helping relatives or others in need, and looking after grandchildren. They carried on learning with U3A or the Workers' Educational Association, reading widely, attending concerts and theatre, meeting friends, experiencing a continuous process of growth in later life, and gradually winding down as they became physically weaker, though rarely before their late seventies or eighties. Their energetic, outgoing lives illustrate why they reject commonplace stereotypes of older people as vulnerable, costly 'burdens', rightly pointing out how much older people contribute to society and the economy through voluntary

action, care for others and paying taxes. They are aware of how much they benefited from full employment and the welfare state but also that not all have done so well, leaving too many older people in severe poverty and loneliness. They regret their grandchildren's lesser work opportunities and the declining welfare state. Several state their willingness to pay more tax to raise state pensions for the poorest, revive the National Health Service and improve social care services. One respondent points out that those born in the 1940s and after have been more prepared to speak up, urging them to do more to lobby and campaign for better services, their predecessors having been 'too submissive and quiet'. This is a revealing set of narratives about how some older people see their lives, raising important questions about how they are seen by others.

Reference

Bazalgette L, Holden J, Tew P, Hubble N and Morrison J (2011) *Coming of Age*. London: Demos. Available at https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Coming_of_Age__web.pdf?1302099024.

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